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# Societal security and education in deeply divided societies



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## Abstract

This paper seeks to demonstrate the often-conflicting agendas that are bestowed on education in deeply divided societies. In doing so the paper seeks to promote a more nuanced understanding of the significance conferred on education, in order to better articulate the way in which education can interact with conflict.

## Key Words

Education

Conflict

Segregation

Security

## Introduction

Over the past decade, the international education agenda has shifted toward a more nuanced understanding of education's relationship with power and conflict. Scholarly debate now reflects education's peacebuilding potential, emphasising the positive impact of creating more inclusive education systems that contribute to social change (Novelli, 2015; Smith et al, 2011; Paulson, 2011; King and Monaghan, 2016). Correspondingly, the understanding of conflict in international relations has been broadened to include an understanding of education's role in promoting security (Ghosh, 2017; Swimelar, 2013; Waever, 1993). However, while the growth of these fields would appear to be mutually reinforcing, there are actually marked differences in how each sector conceptualises education. Consequently, there is a noted disconnect between these two disciplinary approaches and how they interact. This paper attempts to address this disconnect by merging the exploration of societal security (and its extension into securitisation) in the field of international relations with the relevant theoretical literature on education in conflict affected societies. In doing so the paper will seek to promote a more nuanced understanding of the significance conferred on education, in order to better articulate the way in which education can interact with conflict.

## Societal Security

The concept of 'security' within international relations has undergone a conceptual evolution over the last few decades. It is no longer defined solely by neorealist interpretations of national or interstate security. Critical security scholars have expanded security studies to include a disparate body of scholarship. That is to say that the 'security' issues are no longer confined to domains relevant

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only to the objective survival of a state. Both sites of 'threat construction' and sites of 'defence' have been expanded to include a variety of social domains. Consequently, security interests can create a mechanism through which social functions and practices are co-opted under the necessity of security concerns (See Buzan, 2006; Novelli, 2010 and Nguyen, 2014).

This paper draws on what the Copenhagen School referred to as 'societal security' (Buzan, 1991; 1993; Buzan and Waver, 1998). Societal security is defined as 'the ability of a society to persist in its essential character under changing conditions and possible or acute threats. More specifically, it is about the sustainability, within acceptable conditions for evolution, of traditional patterns of language, culture, association, and religious and national identity and custom' (Waever, 1993:23). Societal Security therefore goes beyond the traditional notion of the defence of territory to consider the character of the society being defended, and the critical functions of that society which must be secured for that character to persist. The identity of community (its 'we' identity) (Roe, 2004), rather than the sovereignty of state, therefore becomes the referent object of security in its own right.

It is important to note, therefore, that threats to societal security 'span from the inhibition of its expression to the prevention of its continuation' (Waever, 1993:24) and are not just found in the physical acts of war. Thus, threats to societal identity can be found outside of the realm of physical security and ethnic cleansing. By suppressing an identity and thereby preventing it from replicating or reproducing itself, the identity cannot be transmitted effectively from one generation to the next and a group's societal security is threatened (Buzan, 1993: 43). Such acts of aggression can be referred to as 'cultural cleansing', acts which are committed against manifestations of group identity rather than populations themselves. For example, restrictions to religious and educational establishments strike against the very core of societal identity.

For societies that perceive a threat to their identity, whether the threat is real or imagined, a clear defensive strategy is to strengthen societal security. As Waever et al (1993b: 191) note 'this can be done by using cultural means to reinforce societal cohesion and distinctiveness, and to ensure that society reproduces itself correctly.' Waever argues that culture can be defended 'with culture', and that

- 'If one's identity seems threatened... the answer is a strengthening of existing identities.' (Weaver, 1993: 68). The strengthening of identity can be achieved through the pursuit of what has become known as 'cultural nationalism'. Hutchinson (1994) describes the purpose of cultural nationalism as the re-creation of their distinctive national civilisation. Furthermore, he emphasises the establishment of 'cultural societies and journals' that educate communities of their common heritage 'of splendour and suffering' (Hutchinson, 1994:124) stressing similarities such as language, religion and history.

Education can serve as a medium through which culture and identity can be strengthened. Education systems provide an obvious vehicle to transmit cultural practices, historical accounts, religion, language and even geographical interpretations of homelands to the next generation of a community (Bush and Salterelli, 2000). A school ethos can be created that expresses a pride in identity and belonging to the group through honouring ethnically specific poets and artists and commemorating historical achievements. Each aspect of the curriculum provides an opportunity for education to be used as a means of societal defence and strengthen culture with culture.

Furthermore, in addition to being a space for defensive action, education is also a site in which threats to societal security can be interpreted. If opportunities to harness education for the purposes of cultural reproduction are perceived to be inhibited, this can be inferred as a threat to a community's ability to reproduce itself and hence a threat to its societal security and very existence. For example, the denial of language rights in the education system can be viewed as a direct attack on group identity as it is 'through its language, a given group expresses its own culture, its own societal identity; languages are related to thought processes and to the way the members of a certain linguistic group perceive nature, the universe and society' (Stavenhagen, 1996: 68). In this sense, a security focused call for access to mother tongue education would move beyond highlighting the merits of improved learning outcomes and reinforcing a child's self-esteem, to include the positive impact in terms of a community's manifestation of group identity.

When education in conflict affected contexts is viewed through a security lens, we can see that it takes on an additional purpose, that of reinforcing a group identity to ensure a group's continuation in

uncertain terms. In this sense education becomes a non-military weapon used to attack (restrict the identity of others) and defend (protect one's own identity) societal security. Therefore, in divided fragile contexts, it is possible that 'ethnic survival' can be added to the list of factors driving calls for ethnically appropriate education (alongside pedagogical advancements and rights-based representation).

Conceptualising education in this way raises questions about the different ways in which education is harnessed to create peace and security. Here, education is understood to contribute to a group's security by reinforcing the distinctiveness at the exclusion of others. However, peacebuilding education narratives often stress education's transformative nature and its ability to facilitate inclusivity in fragile contexts (for example the UNICEF Peacebuilding Education and Advocacy (PBEA) Programme). This inconsistency highlights an inherent paradox in the way in which education is understood by different actors. The following section will unpack some of the dangers that can arise if we do not recognise this conceptual contradiction.

## Securitisation

In order to further understand the implications of education's use as a defence mechanism for societal security, we need a framework that enables us to ascertain the extent to which education can become a societal security issue. For this we can turn back to the Copenhagen School and their concept of securitisation (Buzan et al, 1998). The Copenhagen School posits a spectrum along which issues can be plotted with regard to their status within the security realm. The spectrum ranges from those issues that have been politicised but can be managed within the existing political system, to those issues which require action beyond the state's normal political procedures and have therefore been securitised. Therefore, the issue is only placed at the securitised end of the spectrum when emergency measures have been adopted. Hence to declare that an issue has become securitised 'is to not only claim that it has become a security issue but also that the elite (or community representatives) have responded by adopting emergency measures' (Collins, 2005: 573).

To securitise something, an actor has to present the issue as an existential threat to security, in this investigation, a threat to societal security. A securitising actor can come from any sphere of life, but the overall recognition is that if a securitising actor has been elected to represent a community within

a certain domain, as long as the securitising move is within their remit, then the actor has legitimacy (Collins, 2003: 571). The threat perceived by the actor must be deemed significant enough to require 'emergency measures'. It must be presented to the audience with the presumption that 'if we do not tackle this problem, everything else will be irrelevant because we will not be here or be free to deal with it in our own way' (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 1998: 24). By suggesting that an issue is an existential threat to societal security, the actor is therefore asking permission to take action which takes 'politics beyond the normal rules of the game' (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 1998: 24). If the actor is successful, then an emergency measure to tackle the issue will take place outside of the usual arena and therefore the issue will become securitised. However, not all issues presented in this way will necessarily be successful; some issues may just experience 'securitising moves' (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 1998: 23), securitising speech and politicisation, without becoming securitised.

To provide a clear example of how this would work in the education sector we can turn to two examples. The first is illustrated by the conflicts between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo. When faced with the state's assimilationist education structures which prohibited teaching programmes in Albanian, Albanian communities chose to open their own ethnically affiliated schools (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000), as such 'defending culture with culture'. By refusing to send their children to the state-run schools and favouring the non-accredited parallel schools, treated by the Government as illegal, the Albanian community took emergency action to tackle the perceived threat to their societal security. These schools were outside the state system and the normal arena for education policy and practice. All three stages of the process were met in this case and access to ethnically affiliated education became securitised for the Albanians in Kosovo. Community leaders presented the threat from state education to the group's societal security, the audience accepted the presence of the threat and emergency action was taken in the form of non-accredited, non-state school provision.

A second example can be drawn from Iraq where a lack of funding for ethnically appropriate education resources for minority groups lead to securitising moves by community actors. When faced with a lack of linguistically appropriate textbooks the Turkmen community framed the issue as an attack on their continued presence in the region, parents accepted

this threat and emergency action was taken in the form of accepting education resources from actors outside of the state education system. Resources and funding were accepted from a range of local ethnically affiliated political parties and international donors (Shanks, 2015).

When a community enables an actor to take these emergency measures, they grant the actor extraordinary power over that issue. The labelling of a problem as a 'security issue' may result in little or no assessment or regulation imposed on the implementation of the emergency measures taken (Grayson, 2003). Collins (2005:571) states that 'there exists, therefore, the danger that having granted the actor the right to implement extraordinary measures, the audience forfeits its authority to determine the legitimacy of future actions undertaken by the actor'. As such, by securitising the issue the audience and actor have jointly contributed to placing it 'beyond the realm of reasonable public scrutiny' (Collins, 2005:572). Grayson (2003) provides a valuable analogy involving Frankenstein's monster to caution how precarious securitisation can be. Collins (2005:571) states that it is a valuable metaphor for securitisation because 'it not only captures the loosening of constraints on the actor that allows them to act almost with impunity, but it also visualizes just how powerful the securitizing actor can become.' In this respect, granting external actors power within the education arena raises a number of serious considerations. The possible abuse of power and authority can lead to negative outcomes in terms of curriculum content and classroom delivery. Without public scrutiny education content can be manipulated to serve the interests of political elites or religious extremists, fostering a divisive ethno-centric ethos (rather than strengthen and celebrate culture). If emergency measures are granted within the education arena and that power is abused, it can lead to wider repercussions for the rest of society and inter-ethnic relations.

## Counter measures

Framing education within the security narrative also enables us to capture the tensions and contradictions of competing security agendas. That is to say that how education is operationalised to enforce security differs between actors, and these understandings can be in opposition with one another. There are inherent challenges posed by the differing objectives

of groups within a society. For example, central governments may see the proliferation of ethnic schooling, not as the strengthening of communities, but as a threat to the security and integrity of the state. As such counter measures may be sought to encourage or enforce 'integration'. Such attempts can fall across a spectrum of intentions, from mass assimilation (denial of societal security through education) to integrationist strategies (representation of identity in diverse environments). To illustrate these counter measures, we can look to the enforced assimilationist attempts of the Ba'ath party in Iraq (Shanks, 2005) and the management of Kurdish education rights in Turkey (Hassanpour et al; 1996) and the post-genocide education policy in Rwanda, which has prioritised national unity that embraces being 'Rwandan' as opposed to ethnic difference (Rubagiza, 2016).

Within the societal security framing we can see that such 'counter-measures' by the state may in turn lead to the further securitisation of education by ethnic groups. To understand this process of action-reaction, we can draw on the concept of 'security dilemmas' (Posen, 1993). In essence, the security dilemma defines a situation whereby actors will take action to create their own security, yet these actions lead to further insecurity by provoking fear in neighbouring actors. Therefore, any attempt an actor makes to increase its own security will cause neighbouring actors to act in kind therein actually decreasing its security. As a result, a spiral of action and reaction is manifested in which each side's behaviour is seen as threatening (Roe, 2004). This paper suggests a utility in applying this to the action reaction process in the education arena.

Key to this understanding of security dilemmas is how a threat is constructed, in this case; how does ethnically separate homogenous schooling pose a threat to state unity? This question returns us to the issue of nationalism within schools. As previously noted, 'cultural nationalism' is often the defensive tool used by those wishing to protect societal security. While this objective does not pose a direct risk to the state (or other communities), 'ethnic nationalism' potentially does<sup>1</sup>. Roe (2003) suggests that it is actually the ambiguity of nationalist projects and movements that can prompt conflict in multi-ethnic states. As such, the undistinguishable nature of 'cultural' and 'ethnic' nationalist projects within schools can create irresolvable uncertainty regarding the intended use of education.

<sup>1</sup>As the central political tenet of ethnic nationalism is that each ethnic group is entitled to self-determination.

Therefore, any use of nationalism in schools may prompt a central government to fear actions within education that may lead to a decrease in their political or territorial control. This creates what can be seen as inherent paradox, the use of cultural nationalism within school to increase societal security by ethnic groups is met with counter measures by the state, which in turn creates opportunities for education to be further securitised and open to external influences and actual ethnic nationalism.

## Conclusion

By acknowledging the significant pool of literature on societal security protection and the concept of protecting culture with culture, the paper has sought to demonstrate the often-conflicting agendas that are bestowed on education in deeply divided societies. Repressive education policies and failure to support minority representation are often presented as a denial of rights that leads to assimilation and grievance. Yet the societal security framing of education presents a more nuanced understanding of the impact of denied education rights, highlighting the often-neglected reactions of education community actors to such restrictions.

By understanding the significance conferred on education in terms of societal security protection, we can better articulate the way in which education and conflict interact. This paper proposes that in order to truly harness education's potential for peacebuilding, educationalists, political scientists and security theorists must engage in more inter- disciplinary explorations of education's purpose in conflict affected contexts.

## Author Bio

**Kelsey Shanks** is the Global Challenges Research Fund Challenge Leader for Education Research within UK Research and Innovation and a Senior Lecturer at Ulster University. Her research agenda focuses on the relationship between education and conflict in divided societies, with an exploration of education's links to post-conflict stabilisation and peacebuilding agendas. She has conducted extensive research in Iraq, along with work in Ukraine, Palestine, Syria, Somalia and Lebanon. Kelsey is the author of *Education and Ethno-Politics; Defending Identity in Iraq* (Routledge, 2015) and various book chapters and articles.

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